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SUBJECT: HASHIMI ON UPCOMING TRAVEL TO SYRIA, IRAN;
DE-BAATH LAW; BLOC LEADERS MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: VP Hashimi and the Ambassador met on the eve of the VP's March 5 trip to Syria and discussed the possibility of a bloc leaders' retreat to raise key political issues and reach agreement on a way forward. Hashimi noted that he would return from Syria at the end of the week and leave for Iran shortly after. Hashimi, who has been contemplating a trip to Iran for months, said that while he did not trust Iranian intentions, it was necessary to confront them with his concerns over their interference. On the De-Baathification law, Hashimi said that VP Abdel Mahdi appeared to be in favor of the compromise version personally, however was facing difficulties getting the Shi'a coalition support for the bill. The VP and the Ambassador agreed that joint submission of the compromise draft to the CoR from the Tawafuq, Iraqiyya, and Kurdish Alliance bloc leadership was a good alternative to Presidency Council submission, and would send a strong message of support for a De-Baathification law that contributes to national reconciliation. End Summary.

ON BLOC LEADERS RETREAT: AGENDA MORE IMPORTANT THAN LOCATION

¶2. (S) The Ambassador raised the possibility of a meeting between VP Hashimi, VP Abdel Mehdi, Abdel Aziz Al Hakim, PM Maliki, Masoud Barzani and others to agree on a political agenda in the wake of the security gains achieved by the troop surge. The Ambassador noted Barazani's preference for holding the meeting in Kurdistan, where the leaders would be forced to sit down for an extended period of time to work out their differences. Hashimi said that the meeting's location was less important than getting a commitment from all participants to focus on a meaningful agenda. The VP suggested that the agenda consist of reconciliation issues such as "welcoming the national resistance" (NFI), amnesty, and addressing the needs of former officers; he added that building mutual trust among leaders and addressing the PM's "overstepping of boundaries" were of crucial importance.

REGROUPING ON COMPROMISE DE-BAATH LAW

¶3. (S) Hashimi said that while the compromise draft of the de-Baathification law had his and President Talabani's support, VP Abdel Mehdi had been slow to sign off. He said that while Abdel Mehdi was personally in favor of the bill, he was facing difficulties garnering Shi'a coalition support; as such it was unlikely that he would sign. Both agreed that VP Abdel Mehdi should have a few more days to try and rally His coalition, however in the event he did not sign, there should be an alternative approach to pushing the bill forward to the CoR. A joint Iraqiyya, Tawafuq, and KAL submission of the compromise draft to the CoR at the start of the new term would send a strong message of political support for an

alternative de-Baathification law and bode well for its passage.

TRAVEL TO SYRIA AND IRAN

¶ 4. (S) Hashimi said he intended to discuss with the Syrians the potential for good bi-lateral relations - if the Syrians would become serious on border and airport security issues. He noted that he intended to return to Iraqi briefly and continue on to visit Iran before traveling to Japan in late March. Hashimi said that Talabani and Shi'a coalition leaders had been pressuring him to visit Iran for months, and pointed to a positive conversation between King Abdallah and the Iranians where they agreed to work towards ending sectarian violence. While Hashimi had low expectations of the visit outcomes, he had come to believe that he must directly confront the Iranians with his concerns over their interference and request assurances that they would play a positive role. He said he would raise Iranian funded and directed death squads, the presence of Moqtada Al-Sadr and fears that JAM elements were being re-trained and re-armed in Iran.

KHALILZAD